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ABSTRACT

In what way are peoples' future self-concepts affected by thoughtful appraisal and study of the sex-role literature in psychology? A 10-week course taught by a feminist psychologist stressed the harmful effects to both sexes of sex-role stereotypes. Traditional sex roles were presented as stifling, restrictive, false, and inappropriate if the goal is to maximize human potential. As a result of the instructor's bias, it was expected that the class would have even greater respect for traditionally valued female traits, and less admiration for such traditionally male valued traits. The self-concept scale employed not only had high social desirability values associated with them, but the items represented traits highly valued in only one sex. The course had its intended effect of female-valued personality traits, that is, greater valuation. It had the opposite effect than intended on male-valued personality traits. Male competency items were far more valued now by both sexes. The ideal adult of tomorrow, sex unspecified, will be more "masculine" in many ways than the college men of today. (Author/KE)

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Trying to Take Sex Role Out of Self-Concept[1]

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Women faculty in psychology departments across the country are attempting to interpret the fast-growing literature on sex roles through courses entitled Psychology of Women, Psychology of Sex Differences, Psychology of Sex Role Socialization. I say "women faculty" because female psychologists in particular are concerned about the pervasiveness of sex-role stereotypes and their harmful effect on human development. The present research was concerned with the effects of such a college course on the concept of the "ideal adult, sex unspecified." This research was an attempt to see in what way peoples' future self-concepts might be affected by thoughtful appraisal and study of the sex-role literature in psychology.

Method

Course. The 10-week course, Psychology of Sex Differences, was taught by a feminist psychologist who stressed the harmful effects to both sexes of sex-role stereotypes. For example, the implications for women seeking therapy were explored looking at the findings of the Brovermans which suggested that clinicians have a double standard of mature behavior with healthy women being more dependent, passive, fearful,

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etc. than healthy men. Likewise, the sources of male oppression were explored and the benefits of Men's Liberation extolled--liberation from roles which stress hard work, competitiveness, achievement, bravery, controlled emotionality, and low self-disclosure. The aim was to free men from the real-man syndrome. Thus, traditional sex roles were presented as stifling, restrictive, false, and inappropriate if our goal is to maximize human potential.

The course also reinforced the instructor's bias that certain traditionally-valued female traits such as emotional expressiveness, cooperation, concern for others' welfare, and affiliation are some of the finest personality characteristics going, particularly if survival of the species is to be insured. Thus, as a result of this bias, it was expected that the class would have even greater respect for such traditionally valued female traits as tactfulness, gentleness, and sensitivity to others, and less admiration for such traditionally male-valued traits as aggressiveness, dominance, leadership, and hiding of emotions.

Self-Concept Scale. The self-concept scale employed here was developed by the Brovermans. It is unique in that its items not only have high social desirability values associated with them, but the items represent traits highly valued in only one sex. For example, both men and women have 75% agreement that "very logical" is masculine and "very gentle" feminine. The Brovermans' Self-Concept Scale also reflects the fact that masculine characteristics are more frequently valued in our society: 70% of their items are "male-valued," i.e., the masculine pole is more often perceived as desirable. The Brovermans' scale is thus useful for investigating both

sex-role stereotypes and self-concept. In the present study the two sets of male-valued items (28) and female-valued items (12) were analyzed independently. These bipolar items were of the form "Very active - Very passive" separated by a seven-point scale. They were randomly ordered with equal numbers of right and left poles being socially desirable.

The expected shifts in social desirability on the Self-Concept Scale were looked at two ways. First, with respect to class members' self-concepts, it was expected that within each sex total scores on the female-valued items would go up, while total scores on male-valued items would go down. Secondly, looking at the Scale items individually, those that were female-valued were expected to shift from pre to posttest towards the female pole and items that were male-valued were expected to shift away from the male pole.

Nature of the Dependent Variable. At this point the meaning of the scores derived from the Self-Concept Scale must be made explicit. A control group of students provided a measure of the amount of shift on the Scale over the quarter under instructions both pre and post to describe themselves. The Sex Differences class on pretest responded to these same self-descriptive instructions. However, on posttest the Sex Difference class received unusual instructions: now they were asked to describe the ideal adult, sex unspecified. Thus, what we're dealing with here is a difference score with a baseline of where each student was self-conceptwise at the beginning of the course pitted against the cumulative effect of the course--each student's conclusion about what an ideal adult should be like. It is a score that measures the difference between reality, the way things are, with the way things might be. They could have been asked on posttest to describe themselves again, but who can believe that such changes, even after 10 weeks

and no matter how statistically significant, will turn out to be basic and permanent. What was desired instead was the direction of future changes in self-concept if courses on sex roles spread. A better design would have used ideal adult ratings by both control and experimental groups both pre and posttest. In the meantime there will be ambiguity as to whether this Sex Differences course or the posttest instructions themselves produced the shifts observed.

Subjects. The Sex Differences class members will be referred to from here on as experimental Ss. The class of 78 included 55 females, 23 males. The 109 controls (53 females, 56 males) were in another sophomore-level psychology class the same quarter.

Results

First, the analyses of changes in subjects' scores. Four 2X2 analyses of variance were performed: for the male-valued items and for the female-valued items separately for the pre and posttest looking at Sex of subject and "Treatment" (control and experimental groups). Because of the unequal sizes of the Sex X Treatment groups, a linear regression design was used in each analysis of variance, the sources of variance being analyzed incrementally (Lunneborg, 1974). Sex was evaluated first as a single predictor. Then Treatment was evaluated for its predictive increment, given Sex as a predictor. Thirdly, the interaction between Sex and Treatment was evaluated for its predictive increment, given Sex and Treatment as predictors. So what we're talking about are four separate such linear regression analyses.

Considering first the male-valued items: on the pretest males scored significantly higher than females and, unfortunately, experimentals scored

higher than controls. On the posttest the control Ss were unchanged (males going from a mean of 128 to 127, females from a mean of 116 to 117), while the experimentals changed opposite to the predicted direction (males went from $\bar{X}$ 132 to 141, females from $\bar{X}$ 124 to 146). This unexpected treatment effect was highly significant, ($F = 91.1$, $p < .001$), the amount of change in experimental females being so great as to produce an interaction, the females scoring higher than males in the experimental group but lower than males in the control group on, remember, male-valued items. Considering next the female-valued items: on the pretest females scored significantly higher than males and, fortunately, there were no differences between experimentals and controls. On the posttest, control Ss were unchanged (males going from a mean of 55 to 54, females from a mean of 60 to 59), while the experimentals changed significantly in the predicted direction (males went from a $\bar{X}$ of 55 to 59, females from $\bar{X}$ 59 to 63.) The treatment F of 19.7 was significant beyond the .01 level, but far less impressive than the F-value for male-valued items.

Next, we'll consider the Item analyses. Here t-tests were performed for each item, first comparing control and experimental males, and control and experimental females on the pretest; second, comparing change scores from pre to posttest for males and females separately (subtracting the change in controls from that in experimentals); and third comparing the change scores in experimental Ss, males vs. females (Nie, Bent, & Hull, 1970).

First, did the control and experimental Ss differ on the pretest in their scores on these items? On the male-valued items there was only one pretest item difference for males (experimentals more aggressive), but there were five pretest differences for females--experimentals being more

adventurous, aggressive, worldly, self-confident, and less excitable in a minor crisis. On the pretest for female-valued items there was only one significant difference between control and experimental males and two differences between females. Thus, a second ambiguity in the interpretation of these results lies in the initial difference between controls and experimentals which seems mostly due to a more masculine self-concept among experimental females.

Next, when pretest scores were subtracted from posttest scores to measure the shift in control vs. experimental subjects on the items, on the male-valued items both sexes behaved contrary to prediction. On eleven items experimental males indicated that the ideal adult, sex unspecified, would be even more masculine than they had been at the quarter's start. Females agreed with males on ten of these 11 items and additionally indicated as ideal nine other male traits of which the most important were "likes math and science very much," "feelings not easily hurt," "very adventurous," and "easily able to separate feelings from ideas." Declining male-valued items were "almost always hides emotions" by both sexes, "never cries" by males alone, and competitiveness by females alone. On the female-valued items the predicted shift among experimental subjects towards the female pole occurred but was not as extensive as the unpredicted shift towards the masculine pole on male-valued items.

Discussion

To sum up, while the course had its intended effect on female-valued personality traits, that is, greater valuation, it had the opposite effect than intended on male-valued personality traits. Male competency items--independence, decisiveness, self-confidence, worldliness--were far more

valued now by both sexes. The ideal adult of tomorrow, sex unspecified, will be more "masculine" in many ways than the college men of today. The only aspect to "masculinity" rejected by males had to do with control of emotionality paralleling the increased value of expressiveness as a female trait.

Similarily, more traditionally male-valued traits will be valued in the future than traditionally female-valued traits Thirty-nine percent of male-valued items were given greater value by males, 68% of them greater value by females. In contrast, only 33% of the female-valued items received greater value by males vs. a 42% increase in value by females.

A study which helps to explain these results is that of Ellis and Bentler (1973). They found that opposition to traditional sex-role standards related positively to perceiving less difference between oneself and the other sex on the Broverman self-concept items. This would explain in the present study why experimental males increased their scores on female-valued items and why experimental females increased their scores on male-valued items. Opposition to traditional sex roles meant a shift toward the values of the other sex. And why did each sex also shift towards the values of the same sex? Ellis and Bentler might say it has to do with the lack of correlation they found between the distance between self and same sex and opposition to traditional sex-role standards. They concluded that if traditional, nonfunctional, sex-determined role standards were eliminated, it would mean an expansion of the role sphere, so that other sex roles in addition to same sex roles could be enacted by the individual. This appears to be what happened.

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